

practices contribute to interests and identifications, how can analysis illuminate or resolve the tricky conflicts between competing 'equality' claims – as in current demands that equality for conservative Christians means not having to provide equal services to lesbians and gay men?

Equality's apparent intractability demonstrates the limits and problems of commensurability. This book strongly endorses incommensurability as a fact and norm, but it does not address the political struggles and institutional processes that produce identities, relations and ways of living as comparable. Indeed, the abstraction and simplification of social life to 'talents', 'handicaps' and 'luck' contribute to a form of ordering, as disparate social processes and practices become reduced to a single conceptual system. But should incommensurability fashion an ideal, or is its place and relevance rightly political? Smith offers a clear and interesting account of liberal debates in this area. However, in his keenness to avoid ranking lives and choices, the political norms at stake become lost. Take Smith's account of more radical perspectives. While he identifies such scholars as insisting on difference's pursuit (p. 16) and the right to live outside the norm, a major dimension of radical movements (alluded to but, significantly, not explored) is for *the norm itself to change*. In this book, what is normative or hegemonic is largely occluded, albeit with some sign-posts evident in the presumption that private property is a foundational good, that life-long romantic relationships are monogamous and that identity attachments (while revisable) should also be 'deeply-felt'. But how does Smith's equality/diversity framework relate to other social visions – where the organisation of intimate life, work, governmental decision-making desires and ethos are radically changed? Do such aspirations (to the extent they are aspirations) have a place within equality/diversity theorising? And what otherwise can such theorising offer if key questions about how we want our worlds to become are left outside?

DAVINA COOPER

University of Kent

D.S.Cooper@kent.ac.uk

Guy Standing (2011), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. £19.99, pp. 198, pbk.
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The historic trade-off between 'capital' and 'labour' in the industrialised world was, arguably, the 'welfare state'. The emphasis of social policy throughout much of the twentieth century was placed on the protection of working-class families within the capitalist state.

Ongoing structural changes in society, a result of Global Transformation, continue to facilitate the mobilisation of wage-earners for collective action (Standing, 2009). However, it is no longer the old 'working class' (which has been in decline) that poses the real threat to society, but the growing 'precariat' according to Guy Standing in his latest work.

The basic thesis is simple. Standing presents it in the following way. Out of neoliberal policies, fashioned by globalisation and the demand for flexible labour markets, a growing insecure class has emerged in the world. The global 'precariat' consists of many millions without an anchor of stability or security. They are becoming a dangerous new class according to Standing, a class-in-the-making. Political action is urgent, he argues, because 'the precariat' is currently without direction and could turn to either extremes of the political Left or Right.

The 'precariat' concept may lack rigor as Dean (2012) argues, but it has some attraction. As flexible labour markets spread during the 1980s and 1990s, inequalities grew. Class did not disappear however, but was hidden by the dominant discourses arguing for 'reflexivity', 'individualisation' and 'social exclusion' (Atkinson, 2010). Today, we find increasing numbers of people around the world leading an intolerable existence, as a result of insecure (working)

lives, their anxiety exacerbated by thoroughly inadequate systems of social protection. The human response to precariousness is anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation (the four As). We see it all around us, in the protests and the riots – a reaction to human misery and suffering (Taylor-Gooby, 2012).

For Standing, there are no discernible ‘varieties of capitalism’ or real ‘worlds of welfare’. Social democrats are implicated, for they too embrace neoliberal ideas, and the need for flexible insecure labour. Within the developed world, he estimates that at least a quarter of the adult population belong to the ‘precariat’, which is flanked by the unemployed, welfare claimants and criminalised strugglers. The shift to non-regular jobs, flexi-jobs, casual and temporary labour, along with part-time work and the growth of employment agencies, is part of global capitalism. Employment and job insecurity are defining features of precariousness, as is the wage flexibility required by firms that seek increased flexibility through outsourcing and off-shoring – all of which diminishes employment security and increases anxiety for employees.

Accordingly, we find ourselves at a critical juncture, staring into the ‘inferno’ of libertarian paternalism. In his (‘mildly utopian’) vision of ‘paradise’, freedom and security are delivered in an ecological way. Means-testing, conditionality and paternalistic nudging have no place in a world designed to minimise human anxiety and insecurity. The policy prescription is ‘full commodification’ of labour, ‘defined rights for workers’ and a ‘basic income’ paid to all. In other words, a progressive policy agenda intended to reverse ‘workfare’, the present policy of subsidising dead-end tasks for easing unemployment and underemployment. People should be given proper wage incentives, rather than being forced into ‘workfare’. Importantly, this would help place a market value on care work, which for far too long has been undervalued (or largely unrecognised in the case of informal care). Guy Standing is a long-term advocate of ‘basic income’ and argues that an unconditional, non-taxable basic income or social dividend paid to every member of society would provide the economic security required to ameliorate the effects experienced by the ‘precariat’.

In summary, the analysis and arguments are compelling, for the *The Precariat* brings together and develops many current strands of thought within the (social science) literature, and builds on the materialist tradition which ultimately leads to a rejection of ‘neoliberalism’. Standing captures some of the collectivist social policy tradition established by Richard Titmuss (1938), but with more attention to all forms of work and notions of occupational citizenship. In many ways, *The Precariat* is a product of its time (e.g. the neoliberal government of social insecurity, the age of dualisation) and will be judged as such in years to come. At present, however, the policy prescription feels out of step with public and political attitudes – particularly with welfare retrenchment underway in many of the advanced economies – while governments continue to pursue wage top-up policies, in the form of working tax credits and the like. The social policy community needs to engage more with the issues at stake here, making *The Precariat* essential reading. And as much as I commend Guy Standing on this work, there is an opportunity missed. The notion of ‘flexicurity’ promises to overcome present tensions between labour market flexibility on the one hand and social security on the other. ‘Flexicurity’ is currently something of a buzz word in social policy, and I would have liked to have seen flexicurity models discussed head-on. Calls for international welfare states, global social protection floors and decent minimum wages are increasing (ILO, 2011), but governments are intent on ‘workfare’ and wage-top ups. Disentangling the concepts and arguments on offer here, and, importantly, the implications for those leading precarious lives, requires further work. Guy Standing rejects the current ‘flexicurity’ approach, which he considers to be profoundly wrong, given that it remains focused on labour, not work in the broader sense. Perhaps the best indication of this, however, comes from earlier works, written long before ‘flexicurity’ became a term (Standing, 1986).

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CHRIS DEEMING

University of Bristol

Chris.Deeming@bristol.ac.uk

Thomas Bahle, Vanessa Hubl and Michaela Pfeifer (2011), *The Last Safety Net: A handbook of Minimum Income Protection in Europe*, Bristol: Policy Press. £70, pp. 271, hbk.
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This volume represents an ambitious effort to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of minimum income protection provisions in Europe. A volume like this has been long overdue. Arguably not since the landmark study by Tony Eardley and others published over fifteen years ago (Eardley *et al.*, 1996) has there been an attempt this ambitious to map minimum income protection (MIP) in a large number of countries. It does not need adding, moreover, that a comprehensive volume on social safety nets could not have come at a better time. The economic crisis has pushed unemployment rates in many countries to levels not seen in a generation. Increasing numbers are finding themselves reliant on final safety net provisions for their economic survival. At the same time, minimum income protection is regaining significance at the EU social policy level. In May 2009, the European Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States 'to guarantee the right to a minimum income irrespective of individuals' chances in the labour market' (European Parliament, 2009).

The book is not merely ambitious in its geographical span but also in its purported objectives. The authors claim to address three main questions: (a) what are the similarities and differences between MIP schemes in European countries, (b) how are these similarities and differences related to variations in overall social security systems and (c) what developments and trends can be observed for European MIP schemes?

The authors draw on a variety of data sources, including a self-compiled data base called 'EuMin'. This data base contains institutional, quantitative and comparative indicators of MIP. The most important sources for 'EuMin' were statistics and legal documents available at the websites of national governments, statistical offices and the administering bodies. Clearly, the validity here hinges on the quality and timeliness of the information presented on official websites, and on the correct interpretation of that information.

The volume does a very good job at achieving its first stated objective. A major part of the volume consists of sections on the individual countries covered in the book. This, in effect, is the volume's main feature and added value. These country analyses provide concise and clear descriptions of social safety nets in seventeen European countries. The main characteristics of the various schemes are described, including their historical development and legislative